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SUBJECT: LY ELECTION PREVIEW: TAOYUAN COUNTY

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason 1.4 (B/D)

1. (C) Summary: Taoyuan County, with thirteen seats, is the largest Legislative Yuan (LY) election district in Taiwan. As in other northern districts, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has taken an aggressive nominating strategy and at a minimum hopes to parlay its strong showing during the 2004 presidential election into a modest gain in legislative seats, while the Pan-Blue coalition is seeking to preserve its eight to five seat advantage gained during the last legislative election in 2001. A disintegrating People's First Party (PFP), however, increasingly appears unable to deliver all three seats it gained in 2001 to the Pan-Blue coalition again, and the advantage of Pan-Blue forces is likely to be reduced to a one seat margin of seven to six. End Summary.

A Close Race Worth Watching

2. (C) With a population of 1.8 million people, Taoyuan is the second largest county in Taiwan, after Taipei County, and has the largest number of seats for any single election district on the island. The Taoyuan electorate traditionally has leaned toward Pan-Blue candidates and its eight to five seat distribution in favor of the Pan-Blue was key to securing a Pan-Blue majority in the legislature elected in 2001. During those elections the Kuomintang (KMT) nominated seven candidates and, with 29.8 percent of the vote, won five seats. The PFP grabbed 23.3 percent of the 2001 vote, but was less successful in distributing votes among its slate of five candidates, filling only three seats. The Pan-Green was able to garner over 40 percent of the vote in 2001, most of which (34.4 percent) went to Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidates who captured five seats. Pan-Blue support remained strong in the 2004 presidential election when the Lien-Song ticket gained 55 percent of the vote, but the DPP believes it can retain support from the 45 percent of the electorate that voted for President Chen Shui-bian. To consolidate its vote, the Pan-Blue camp has nominated this year a total of ten candidates, down from thirteen in 2001, with the reduction coming from PFP, which is nominating only two incumbents and one failed candidate. The Pan-Green has nominated a total of nine candidates again this year; the DPP upped its number from six to seven while its Pan-Green ally, the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU), lowered its nominations from three to two.

3. (C) Leading pollsters on Taiwan tell AIT that the race for the top six seats in Taoyuan county looks quite stable, with the KMT taking two seats, the PFP one, and the DPP three. All polls indicate, however, that competition for the remaining seven seats will be fierce as the distance between the slate of candidates ranking seven through sixteen is smaller than the polling margin of error. The battle for these remaining seven seats will be waged primarily between candidates from either the KMT or DPP. A strong showing from the TSU or PFP could displace one of the lower ranked candidates from their larger coalition partners, but it would probably not disturb the projected distribution of seats (seven to six) between the Pan-Blue and Pan-Green camps.

The DPP: Poised To Make Slight Gains

4. (C) The DPP upped its number of nominations for legislative seats this year because of confidence that it can continue to expand its vote in the county, according to DPP Taoyuan County Executive Director Chiou Chuang-tien. DPP Survey Center Director Pan Yi-Shuan told AIT on November 10 that internal party polls show there is enough support in Taoyuan to gain six of the DPP's seven candidates seats if the vote is evenly distributed. Although the DPP would like to see all seven candidates win a seat, Chiou said most likely the party will have to drop support for the weakest candidate in the final week of the campaign and enforce a distribution of votes (peipiao) from the two front runners to the sixth candidate. Chiou is confident that both candidates and DPP supporters in Taoyuan will be willing to put aside their personal interests and follow party directives to ensure the DPP gets six seats.

5. (C) Chiou indicated that the three DPP front runners are

two incumbents, Peng Tien-fu and Chiu Chui-chen, and former candidate for Taoyuan county magistrate, Peng Shao-jin. The two Peng's are expected to get a large enough share of the ethnic Hakka vote to guarantee them seats. Two other DPP incumbents, Lee Chen-nan and Chen Tsung-yi, have strong grass-roots organizations and substantial finances, according to Taoyuan County Vice Magistrate Huang Min-kong, and should pull through giving the DPP another two seats. Lee Yue-chin, Mayor of Ping-Chen city, and Guo Jung-tsung, an incumbent, have smaller bases of support and are likely to be the ones fighting fiercely with each other to squeeze into the thirteenth seat. Executive Director Chiou said the party is concerned that if the DPP vote is spread out too thinly, especially between the sixth and seventh ranking DPP candidates, one of the two TSU candidates could beat out a DPP candidate or could draw off enough Green votes to allow another Pan-Blue candidate to squeeze into the top thirteen. The KMT: Holding its Own  
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16. (C) The KMT is confident that six of the seven candidates running under its banner will gain a seat, according to KMT Taoyuan County Chairman Fu Chung-hsiung. In Taoyuan, the KMT was conservative in its nomination, putting forward only six party members -- the seventh, Chen Li-ling, is a New Party (NP) member running under the KMT flag. Unlike in many other areas of the island, the KMT is not plagued by a plethora of breakaway KMT members running as independents. The KMT front-runners assured of seats, according to Fu, are incumbent Chu Fung-chih who enjoys a strong base of support among the ethnic Mainland community of retired military families, and a young newcomer Wu Chih-yang, the son of KMT Vice Chairman Wu Bo-hsiung, who has strong support from his father's local Hakka political base. Yang Li-huan and Chang Chang-tsair, two incumbents, also enjoy a strong local base and will be getting enough financial support from the KMT, according to Fu, to gain a seat. The other two, incumbent Chen Gen-te and Kui-shan district chief Lin Cheng-fung, have local bases that will be contested by the TSU's Chen Chiang-shun and independent Luo Huan-lu, respectively. Vice Magistrate Huang assessed that the two KMT candidates, nevertheless, have enough backing to overcome the challenge. Political observers in Taoyuan say that Chen Li-ling is not competitive as NP support in 2001 was only 15,000 votes and these votes are likely to go to Cheng Chin-ling, a PFP candidate who has strong support from the ethnic Mainland community.

The PFP: On the Verge of Collapse  
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17. (C) PFP Taoyuan Vice Chairman Yang Chuh-Hsiung says his party expects overall support to contract by 20 to 30 percent from 2001 levels. This time he predicted the party will only garner about 140,000 votes. By reducing the slate of candidates to three, the PFP hopes to preserve its three seats, but even Yang conceded that would be a Herculean task. For starters, the PFP would have to distribute votes from its star incumbent, Sun Ta-chien, who was the single largest vote winner in all of Taiwan in 2001 and remains a highly popular figure. If Sun takes close to the 90,000 votes he received in 2001, a shrinking PFP pie only gives about 50,000 votes to distribute between the two remaining candidates, making it unlikely both would be able to win a seat. Even if Sun supporters decide to help other candidates, Chiu Chang-liang, an incumbent breakaway from the PFP running as a Non-Partisan Solidarity Union (NSU) member, is likely to draw many PFP votes, according to Vice Magistrate Huang. With a reduced support base, poor track record in distributing votes, and competition from former PFP members, the PFP appears unlikely to retain its three seats. At best, it can hope that Sun will distribute enough votes to incumbent Cheng Chin-ling to raise Cheng over the bar.

Comment: Building a Majority One Seat at a Time?  
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18. (C) The race in Taoyuan is emblematic of the contrasting strategies and positions of the Pan-Blue and Pan-Green forces in the north of the island. Although the Pan-Blue has taken a conservative nomination approach and retains significant grass-roots support, it is poised to retain only a slight edge with a reduced margin of victory that will come primarily at the expense of the PFP. The DPP, on the other hand, has made more aggressive nominations in the north because it sees room to grow there. By picking up an additional seat in Taoyuan, the DPP will be taking a step toward expanding both the Pan-Green coalition's representation in the LY and the DPP's share within the Pan-Green coalition. To do so, however, it must succeed in persuading its followers to allocate their votes (peipiao). PAAL